FOCUS ON HIGH SCHOOLS COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ANALYSIS

The Iowa Department of Education conducted 12 Community Conversations throughout Iowa during Spring, 2005 for the purpose of collecting qualitative data regarding perceptions and attitudes about current high school reform efforts. Sessions were held in the following school districts: Anamosa, Aplington-Parkersburg, Charles City, Clarke, Knoxville, Maquoketa, Postville, Sioux Center, Urbandale, Webster City, West Harrison, and Whiting.

The Community Conversations were structured: (1) to provide participants information regarding the Governor's Recommendations on high school reform and possible scenarios to achieve those recommendations, and (2) to obtain participant feedback on strengths and challenges of the recommendations as well as any global recommendations, and local or state challenges and recommendations. Specific areas addressed included the following:

- What excites you about these recommendations?
- What is worrisome about these recommendations?
- What are the benefits for students in these recommendations?
- What are the possible detriments for students?
- If we decide to move in this direction, what will help us?
- If we decide to move in this direction, what will work against us?
- What feedback about the recommendations do we wish to give the Iowa Department of Education?
- What feedback about the recommendations do we wish to give our district?

The Community Conversation format included a primary facilitator who conducted each session, a Department facilitator who presented a scripted presentation outlining the Governor's recommendations, and note-taker who monitored time and recorded the session. Each Conversation lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. Representatives of the Conversations included the following constituency groups: business, the community, educators, parents and students. According to surveys that were completed by participants at each of the Conversations, 109 attendees identified themselves as parents, 18 as students, 64 as educators, 46 as business persons, and 98 as community members. Twenty-two participants identified themselves as fitting into the category of "other." Attendees were told to mark all categories that applied to them so, in some instances, respondents identified themselves as representing more than one constituency group. Based upon notes taken by facilitators, individuals attending included those constituencies listed above and the following: school board members, high school and middle school teachers, State Board members, AEA consultants, religious leaders, community college staff members, a liaison with the local Jewish school, an outreach coordinator with the Hispanic community, and a reporter from the local newspaper. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality, and assured that all information obtained would not be identifiable to them either as individuals or to the Conversation Group in which they participated.

Data presented in this document reflect the analysis of the notes obtained by the note-taker and the Department facilitator. All data were merged, coded, and original source materials stored separately, to insure confidentiality. Data were analyzed using *N6* (2004) a qualitative software program that allows for the identification of themes within large data-sets, using an analysis of Text Units (TU), defined as one line of text. Each question generated data-sets of text units, which were then analyzed for emerging themes. Although many Text Units contained only one theme, some contained two or more and therefore were coded as such. Further, not all Text Units were coded as the units did not contain specific themes. In light of this, the summation of quantitative details will not equal 100% or the total Text Units of analysis, given the potential of both 'dual' coding of themes and non-coding of text.

One thousand three hundred thirty (1330) text units were generated from the focus group data, 1152 from which themes emerged in relationship to the areas of general

information, strengths, concerns, recommendations, local feedback and state issues. Concerns were by far the emphasis of the focus groups: 46% (531 Text Units) of the total information analyzed included information regarding concerns, 15% (176 Text Units) included information on strengths, 10% (120 Text Units) were specific to general information (Participant attendance and role), 10% (114 Text Units) included state recommendations or issues, 10% (110 Text Units) contained general recommendations, and 9 % (101 Text Units) included information on local issues. Figure 1 shows the Text Unit breakdown (number out of 1152 total in final analysis) by the areas: local issues, recommendations, state issues, general information, strengths and concerns. Data in the area of General Information is presented as aggregate demographics of the participant population.

Figure 1. Percent of Text Units in the Areas Local Issues, Recommendations, State Issues, General Information, Strengths and Concerns.
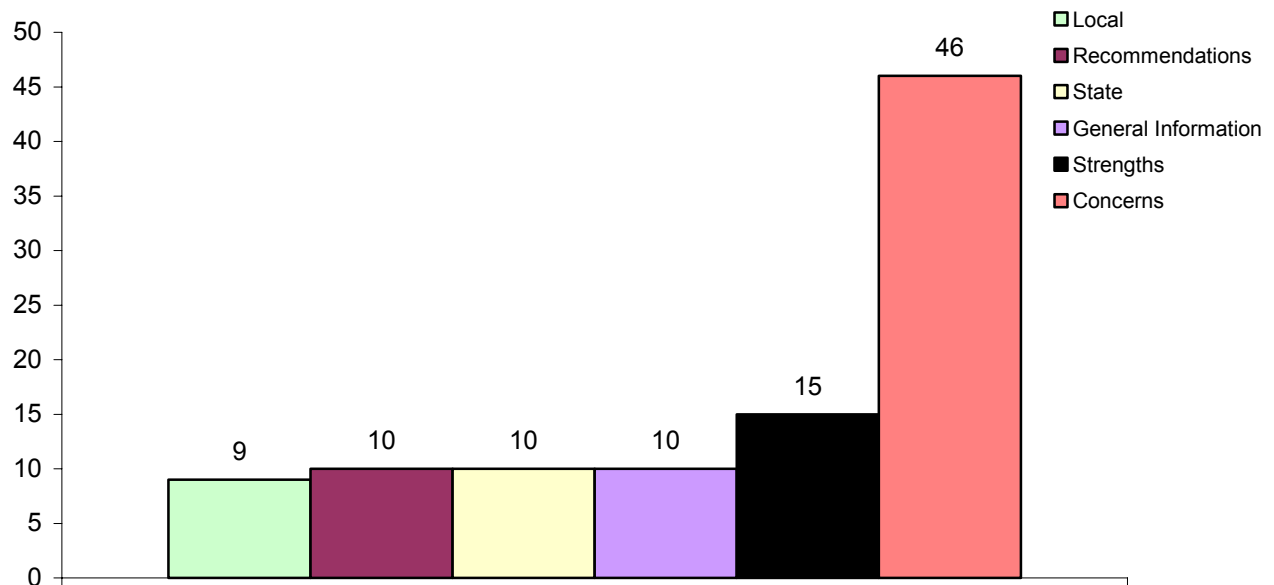
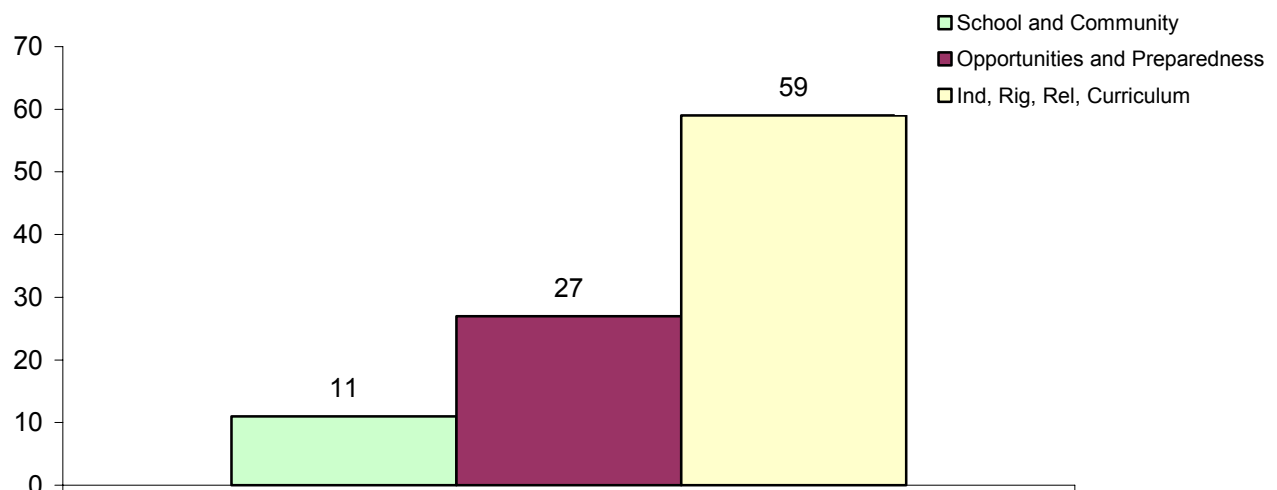*Source*. Community Conversation Analysis: Spring, 2005

531 Text Units emerged to represent 7 themes with a relationship to the area of concerns regarding the Governor's recommendations: Individualized, Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, Attitudes, Support, Student-to-Career, Policy/Procedure/Law, Relationships, and Partnerships and Communication. Figure 2 illustrates each theme as a percent of the total 531 Text Units in the final analysis.

Figure 2. Percent of Text Units by Theme in the Area of Concerns
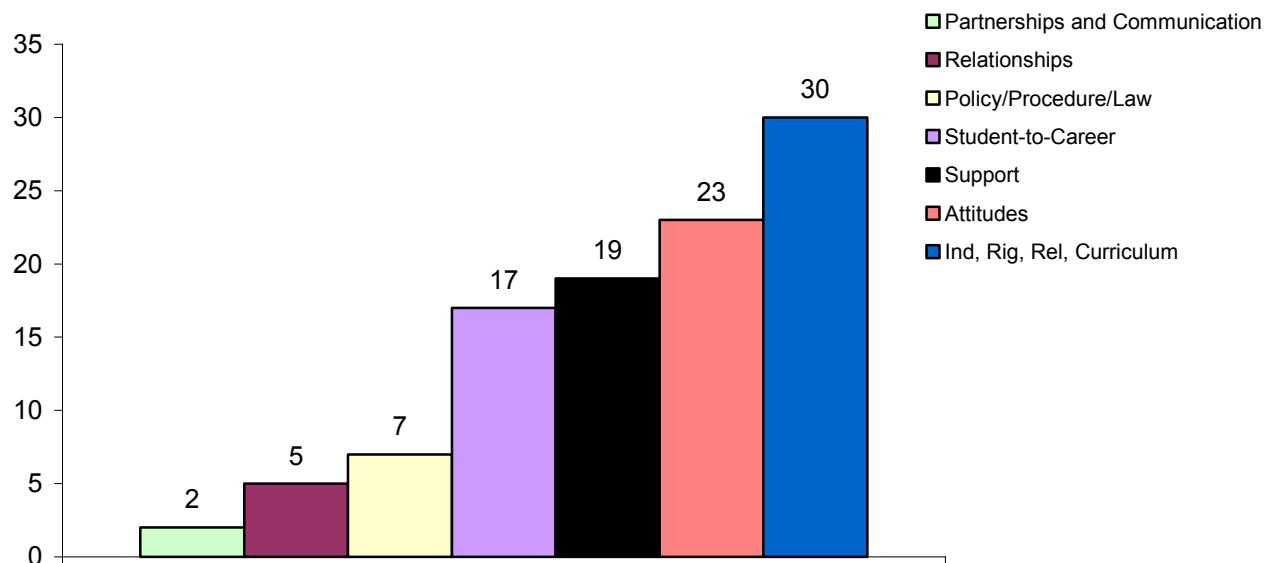
Out of the 1152 Text Units of analysis, 176 emerged to represent 4 themes with a relationship to strengths regarding the Governor's recommendations: Individualized, Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, Opportunities and Preparedness, and School and Community. Figure 3 illustrates each theme as a percent of the total 176 Text Units in the final analysis.
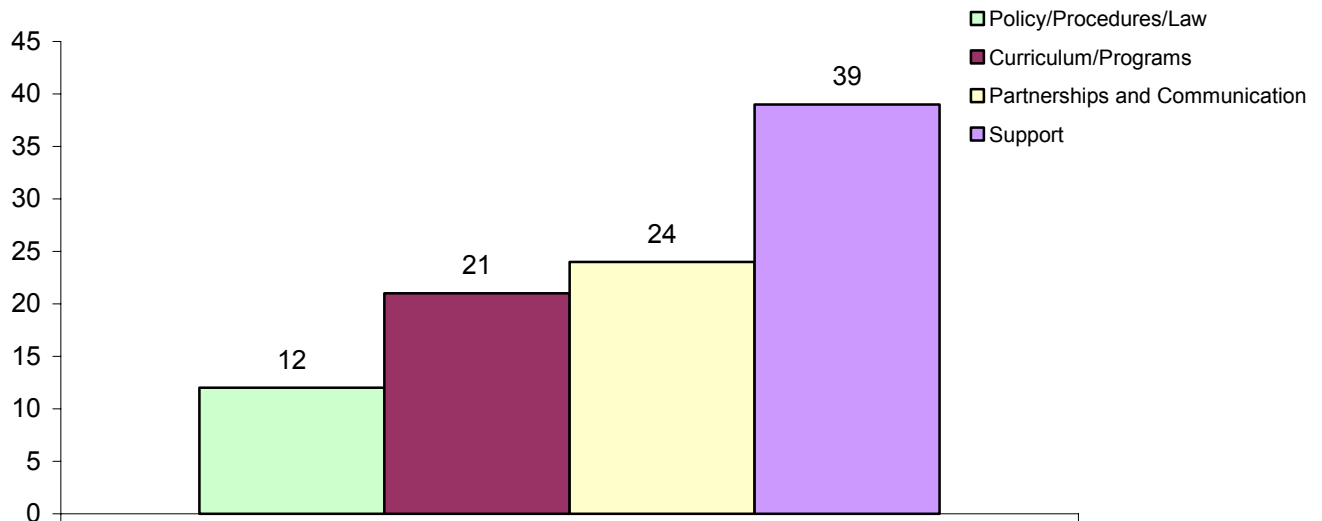
Figure 3. Percent of Text Units by Theme in the Area of Strengths

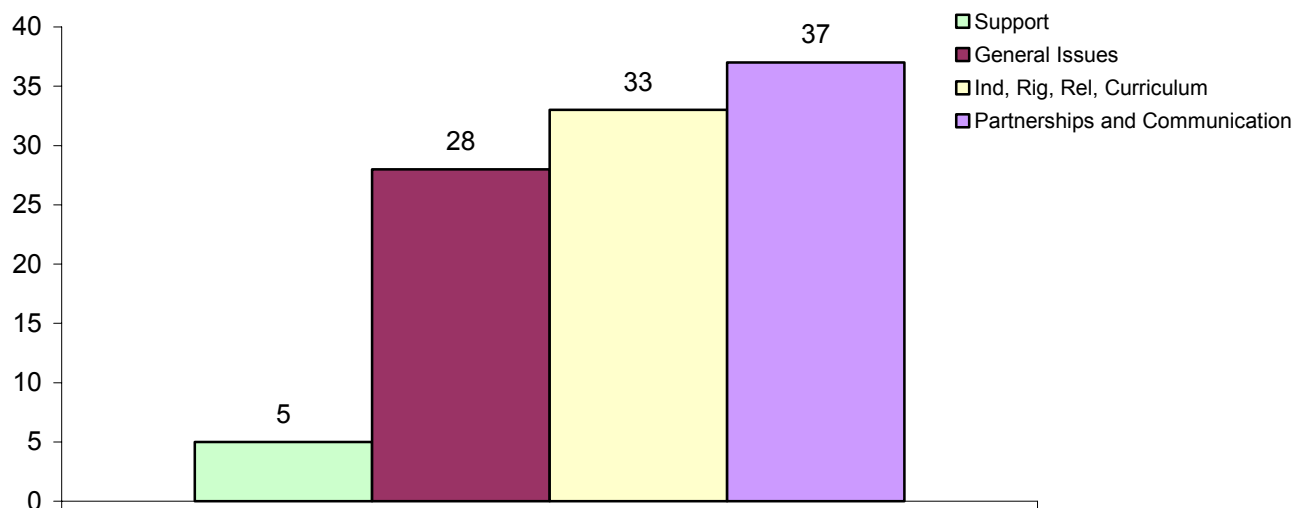*Source*. Community Conversation Analysis: Spring, 2005

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110 Text Units emerged to represent 5 themes with a relationship to the area of recommendations regarding the Governor's recommendations: Support, Partnerships and Communication, Curriculum/Programs, and Policy/Procedure/Law. Figure 4 illustrates each theme as a percent of the total 110 Text Units in the final analysis.

Figure 4. Percent of Text Units by Theme in the Area of Recommendations

Out of the 1152 Text Units of analysis, 101 emerged to represent 4 themes with a relationship to local issues regarding the Governor's recommendations: Partnerships and Communication, Individualized, Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, General Issues, and Support. Figure 5 illustrates each theme as a percent of the total 101 Text Units in the final analysis.

Figure 5. Percent of Text Units by Theme in the Area of Local Issues
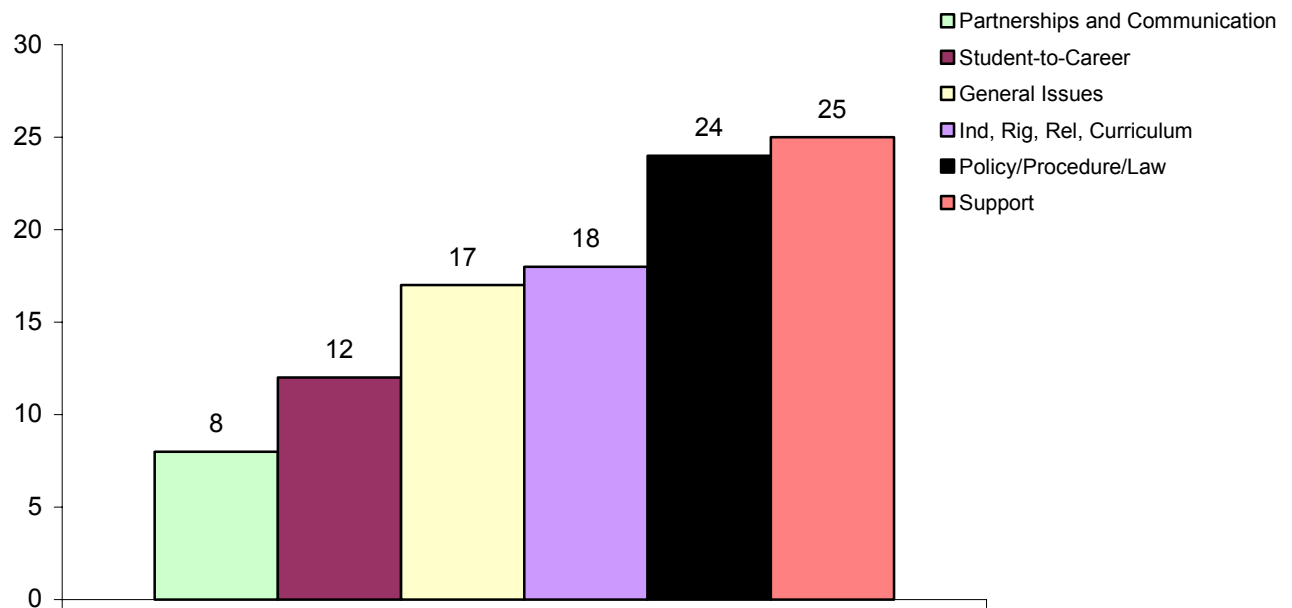

Source. Community Conversation Analysis: Spring, 2005

114 Text Units emerged to represent 5 themes with a relationship to the area of State Issues regarding the Governor's recommendations: Support, Policy/Procedure/Law,

Individualized, Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, General Issues, and Student-to-Career, and Partnerships and Communication. Figure 6 illustrates each theme as a percent of the total 114 Text Units in the final analysis.

Figure 6. Percent of Text Units by Theme in the Area of State Issues

Source. Community Conversation Analysis: Spring, 2005

OVERALL KEY THEMES: STRENGTHS, CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following table represents an overview of the overall key themes in the areas of Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations. Percents included for each area represent the percent of 1152 TUs coded (e.g., Strengths represent 15% of the 1152 TUs coded or 176 out of 1152). Percents under each area represent the percent of TUs for each theme (e.g., Individualized Learning represents 51% of the TUs in the area of Strengths, or 90 out of 176).

STRENGTHS (15%)	CONCERNS (46%)	RECOMMENDATIONS (10%)
Individualized, Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum (59%) • Some indicated the recommendations were individualized to student needs, rigorous and relevant. • Many believed individual student advocates were important to student success and future opportunities. • Some indicated the recommendations would increase student responsibility for their own learning. **Opportunities and Preparedness (27%)** • Some indicated the recommendations provide students more opportunities both during and after K-12 educational experiences. • Some indicated the rigorous, relevant curriculum better prepares students for life after high school. **School and Community (11%)** • Recommendations promoted positive school or community environments. • Some specified that the recommendations provide students with the opportunity to become better, more productive citizens who contribute to school and community.	**Individualized, Rigorous Curriculum (30%)** • Some indicated the recommendations did not fit all students, and were inflexible in nature. • Some pointed out the content embedded within the standards did not emphasize all essential curriculum needed to produce well-rounded students able to continue to post-secondary options (e.g., history, global issues, government, language, geography). • Some voiced concerns that the recommendations did not focus on all learners and did not provide either support or rigorous/relevant curriculum for students who need further challenges as well as those who may have special needs. • Some indicated that the recommendations would increase drop-out rates. **Attitudes (23%)** • Many indicated the existence of the potential for resistance to change from parents, teachers, students and administration. • Some indicated student pressure and stress of the recommendations would render implementation difficult. • Some voiced concern that the Community Conversations were conducted to garner support for the Governor's Recommendations. **Support (19%)** • Some indicated that implementing the recommendations would not be feasible. • Many felt that the recommendations require increased funding, staff and time to implement, and more money for students to attend collge. **Student-to-Career (17%)** • Some indicated there existed a disconnect between the recommendations and ALL students' needs. • Many indicated that post-secondary education does not fit every student, and should not be the focus of the recommendations. **Policy, Procedures, Law (7%)** • Some questioned the accountability of the recommendations – who would be accountable if the recommendations were not realized? • A few indicated compulsory education should not end at 16 to fully realize recommendations. **Relationships (5%)** • Some believed the recommendations would be a detriment to the relationships students have with parents, teachers, and peers. **Partnerships and Communication (2%)** • Some indicated a concern regarding communication and partnerships among state, county, local schools, universities which were not taken into consideration in the recommendations.	**Support (39%)** • Many indicated a need for more money, time and staff to implement the recommendations. • Some pointed out that marketing would be imperative in order to communicate to the public as well as effectively implement the recommendations. **Partnerships and Communication (24%)** • Some pointed out that strong community and key stakeholder input and "buy-in" would be critical in the implementation of any recommendation. • Several indicated the need to develop and capitalize on links with universities to facilitate transition, curriculum, and begin conversations about the Carnegie Unit. **Curriculum/Programs (21%)** • Some indicated programs already in place that would support the recommendations (e.g., local connections with community colleges, alternative schools, programs to support at-risk students). • A few indicated more needs to exist to support students at-risk of school failure. **Policy, Procedures, Law (12%)** • Some indicated that funding needs to be consistent from the legislature. • A few pointed out that the state should simplify and enforce compulsory attendance.

OVERALL KEY THEMES: LOCAL AND STATE ISSUES

The following table represents an overview of the overall key themes in the areas of Local and State Issues. Percents included for each area represent the percent of 1152 TUs coded (e.g., Local Issues represent 9% of the 1152 TUs coded or 101 out of 1152). Percents under each area represent the percent of TUs for each theme (e.g., Partnerships and Communication represents 37% of the TUs in the area of Strengths, or 37 out of 101).

LOCAL ISSUES (9%)	STATE ISSUES (10%)
Partnerships and Communication (37%) • Some indicated that it would be crucial to communicate efforts with the community and businesses – parent involvement and education was of high importance. • Some indicated that a dialogue should be started between local schools and local post-secondary institutions. **Individualized, Rigorous Curriculum (33%)** • Local schools need to look at grading options (mastery vs. grades), as well as more rigorous, relevant curriculum options for students. • More local opportunities--post high school--should be provided to students. • Curriculum should be more individualized to student needs (advanced courses offered earlier, support available, well-rounded education) **General Issues (28%)** • Some indicated that it would be important to change the local ethos slowly; not everyone would embrace the recommendations. • Some indicated that change takes time, but that continued conversations should take place; local community should prioritize and continue to be forward-thinking. **Support (5%)** ▪ A few reported that funding, time and quality staff was an issue at the local level.	**Support (25%)** • The state needs to fully fund mandates; provide more local funding and technical assistance in order to implement and sustain the recommendations. **Policy, Procedures, Law (24%)** ▪ Some indicated the state should maintain and support local control. ▪ A few indicated state legislators should be informed of the focus and needs of the recommendations in order to best apply funding. **Individualized, Rigorous Curriculum (18%)** • The state should take into consideration all learners, and not place so much emphasis on courses, and the 90% post-secondary education. • Some indicated that the state should provide a system for changing the Carnegie Unit; mastery of content should be emphasized rather than grades; individualized relevant curriculum is imperative. **General Issues (17%)** • Some indicated the state should be very clear about what and how changes are implemented. • Some indicated the need for the state to truly listen to the feedback provided during the Community Conversations; a fear was the recommendations were predetermined and that feedback was not taken seriously. **Student-to-Career (12%)** ▪ The state needs to be clearer regarding the definition of post-secondary education; not all students want to attend college. ▪ A few indicated the state shouldn't judge K-12 education by student completion of 2 years of post-secondary education. **Partnerships and Communication (8%)** ▪ The state needs to fully explain the need for change, and obtain input from the various stakeholders (students, universities, parents, teachers, community colleges, businesses).

OVERALL KEY THEMES

The following table represents an overview of the overall key themes in the areas of Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations. Percents included for each area represent the percent of 1152 TUs coded (e.g., Strengths represent 15% of the 1152 TUs coded or 176 out of 1152). Percents under each area represent the percent of TUs for each theme (e.g., Individualized Learning represents 51% of the TUs in the area of Strengths, or 90 out of 176).

STRENGTHS (15%)	CONCERNS (46%)	RECOMMENDATIONS (10%)
Individualized, Rigorous Curriculum (59%) • **CODED:** Curriculum is motivating/interesting, hands-on or relevant, involves mentors, allows students to become more responsible for own learning, involves ALL students needs, increases self-esteem/confidence, promotes life-long learning, is challenging or rigorous **Opportunities and Preparedness (27%)** • **CODED**: Prepare for post-secondary, work, life, opportunity for life/work/college **School and Community (11%)** • **CODED**: Creates positive environment, increased communication, provides ties to/pride in, school and community	**Individualized, Rigorous Curriculum (30%)** • **CODED**: Lack of: Interest, ALL students needs, challenging, individualization, quality, socialization, electives and well-rounded curriculum--One-size fits all - Carnegie Units and recommendation #9 doesn't allow flexibility and meeting all student's needs--Increase in drop-outs. **Attitudes (23%)** • **CODED**: Attitudes, pressures, resistance to changes from parents, community, teachers, students. Also, attitudes of participants that the whole community conversation was a marketing scheme by the department to garner support for the Governor's recommendations **Support (19%)** • **CODED**: No money, time, staff - also no money for kids to go to college or continue, no time to really be flexible in obtaining a degree (taking Algebra over 2 years = not graduating on time) **Student-to-Career (17%)** • **CODED**: Difficulty in preparing students for all possible careers - concern re: focus on #9 and preparing students for post-secondary only, rather than other careers available to them. Disconnect between requirements and ALL students' abilities **Policy, Procedures, Law (7%)** • **CODED**: Policies, procedures, law/code that indicate a problematic issue for change **Relationships (5%)** • **CODED**: Detriment to the relationships between students and others: parents, teachers, peers **Partnerships and Communication (2%)** • **CODED**: Difficulty in partnerships or communication with others outside the school	**Support (39%)** ▪ **CODED**: Money, more staff, more time **Partnerships and Communication (24%)** • **CODED**: Forging Partnerships with others: parents, community, colleges, universities, AEA and so on. Effectively communicating with others **Curriculum/Programs (21%)** • **CODED**: Programs that are in place, programs that need to be developed **Policy, Procedures, Law (12%)** ▪ **CODED**: Recommendations that would need changes in policy, procedures, code, or law

OVERALL KEY THEMES: LOCAL AND STATE ISSUES

The following table represents an overview of the overall key themes in the areas of Local and State Issues. Percents included for each area represent the percent of 1152 TUs coded (e.g., Local Issues represent 9% of the 1152 TUs coded or 101 out of 1152). Percents under each area represent the percent of TUs for each theme (e.g., Partnerships and Communication represents 37% of the TUs in the area of Strengths, or 37 out of 101).

LOCAL ISSUES (9%)	STATE ISSUES (10%)
Partnerships and Communication (37%) • **CODED**: Partnerships with others, communication between/among others	**Support (25%)** • **CODED**: Need of funding, time or training from state
Individualized, Rigorous, Relevant Curriculum (33%) • **CODED**: Motivation, Hands-on, Mentors, Responsibility for own learning, interest, ALL students needs, increase self-esteem/confidence, life-long learning, Challenging, specific to community needs	**Policy, Procedures, Law (24%)** ▪ **CODED**: Recommendations that would need changes in policy, procedures, code, or law. **Individualized, Rigorous, Relevant Curriculum (18%)** • **CODED**: Recommendations on the recommendations-- take into consideration individual needs of students, make it meaningful, Carnegie Unit
General Issues (28%) • **CODED**: General comments on how to deal with change - be positive, go slow......	**General Issues (17%)** • **CODED**: General comments on how to deal with change at the state level; fear the Conversations were to obtain support for the Governor's Recommendations and their feedback won't be heard
Support (5%) ▪ **CODED**: Issues of money, time, qualified staff, and so on	**Student-to-Career (12%)** ▪ **CODED**: Recommendations in preparing ALL students for all possible careers – Addressing the disconnect between requirements and ALL students' abilities **Partnerships and Communication (8%)** ▪ **CODED**: Partnerships with others, communication between/among others